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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #3

(Desired family size and improved health sustainably achieved)

Pangasinan to fill birth-control gap if USAID halts aid

But governor says only fund needed for contraceptives will be provided

LINGAYEN, Pangasinan (PNA) — The family planning program of the Pangasinan provincial government will continue despite the announced pullout of the commodity assistance by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in two to three years.

But Pangasinan Gov. Victor Agbayani clarified that due to the shortage of funds, the provincial government can provide only the need for contraceptives of poor couples in the province.

Pangasinan, with its over two-million population, is the Philippines' second most populous province, next to Cebu.

Agbayani said at a conference of the Regional Development Council last Tuesday that the province will try to fill the gap that would be left by the USAID which has been providing commodity assistance to the country's family planning program since 1972.

USAID had earlier announced that it is completely phasing out all its commodity donation to the country's family planning program either in year 2007 or 2008.

“We will substitute the donation that would be phased out. but we have to separate the poor from the non-poor

couples,” Agbayani stressed.

The governor warned that if local government units do not act fast, the pullout of commodity assistance by the USAID might leave the country's population program in disarray, adding that for three long decades, the agency was supporting the Philippines in its family planning program.

He noted that the national government is not keen in going to the rescue of the country's family planning program because its hands are tied, not only for lack of funds but also because of the strong opposition to the program by the Catholic Church.

Noting the importance of family planning to improve the quality of life of the people, the provincial government is set to pioneer what Agbayani called as commodity self-reliance program in order to make available free contraceptives to poor couples.

“We will see to it that only the poor will have free access to contraceptives,” he said.

Statistics gathered at the Provincial Population Office showed that over half of those who used contraceptives available at government health and family planning clinics were couples who can afford to purchase the items.

(Source: Manila Bulletin, 9/09/05, page G2)